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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Major media (lead story in Ha'aretz) reported that on Monday, the outgoing Palestinian parliament passed a law at its final session substantially expanding the powers of PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas in what Hamas said was a last-minute bid to rein it in before it takes over parliament and forms the new government. The Jerusalem Post reported that PA officials in Ramallah told the newspaper that in an attempt to prevent Hamas from taking control over the media, Abbas decided to place the PA's radio and television stations under his jurisdiction. Israel Radio quoted Mahmoud Zahar, a senior Hamas leader, as saying that his organization does not intend to recognize Israel, that it will continue its armed struggle against Israel, and that he expects the new PA parliament to repeal all agreements signed with Israel. Leading media quoted Khaled Mashal, the head of Hamas's political bureau, as saying in an interview with the Russian newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta that Hamas might disarm. Mashal also recognized the 1967 borders, despite Hamas's position that Palestine's borders are the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Speaking on Israel Radio, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz said that Israel would have preferred Hamas to rescind its charter, disarm, and recognize Israel, but that the GOI has the means to cope with a Hamas-led PA. This morning, the radio cited The New York Times as saying that Israel and the U.S. are coordinating moves to destabilize the PA. Israel Radio quoted senior Israeli diplomatic sources as denying the report.

Israel Radio reported that Mofaz is visiting Cairo this morning to discuss the rise of Hamas with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

The Jerusalem Post quoted a GOI official as saying on Monday that Israel is unconcerned that the current cloud hovering over its relationship with Russia -- because of Russian President Vladimir Putin's invitation to Hamas -- will impact on Moscow's vote in the UN over the Iranian issue.

The Jerusalem Post quoted experts as saying that Hamas is unlikely to drum up enough money to keep the PA afloat very long without help from the West. The newspaper reported that Mashal and his delegation left the Qatari capital, Doha, for Khartoum Sunday, with trips also scheduled to Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran.

Ha'aretz quoted PLO representative in Washington Afif Safieh as saying on Sunday on CNN's Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer that the "pro-Israeli Likud wing around the world" is working to inflame relations between Western and Arab-Muslim societies. Ha'aretz interviewed Ahmed Akari, the young Muslim Dane who presented the controversial Muhammad cartoons to the Muslim Conference in Cairo in December. Akari reportedly told the newspaper: "I see no connection

between our activity [that of Akari's delegation] and the riots. We only tried to demonstrate that a Danish newspaper offended Muslims by deciding to publish caricatures of Muhammad."

On Monday, Ha'aretz reported that Israel completed cutting off the eastern sector of the West Bank from the remainder of the West Bank in 2005. Some 200,000 Palestinians are reported to be prohibited from entering the area, which constitutes around one-third of the West Bank, and includes the Jordan Valley, the area of the Dead Sea shoreline, and the eastern slopes of the West Bank hills. Ha'aretz reported that Israeli military sources told the newspaper that the moves have been "security measures" adopted by the IDF, and that they have no connection to any political intentions whatsoever.

Ha'aretz reported that Hamas's military wing, Izz al-Din al-Qassam, has recently finished registering and collecting weapons used by its activists in the northern Gaza Strip, a process sources said began at the order of Hamas's political bureau, after the Hamas victory at the polls.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the IDF has launched an investigation to determine whether a Palestinian shepherdess was killed on Monday afternoon near the old Kissufim crossing in central Gaza. Israel Radio reported that three Qassam rockets landed in southern Israel this morning, causing no injuries. All media reported that on Monday, Iran resumed its uranium-enrichment program. Maariv and Israel Radio cited research published on Monday by the Oxford Research Group that a surprise American or Israeli air strike on Iranian nuclear sites would involve 100 fighter planes and could cause approximately 10,000 civilian as well as military casualties.

The media reported that the Knesset's House Committee has approved the make-up and powers of the parliamentary commission inquiry into the violent events that took place during the evacuation of the West Bank settler outpost on February 1. The Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee will serve as the commission inquiry. Ratification of the move by the Knesset plenum is still pending.

Leading media reported that the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories is falling apart, as two of its leaders -- Shaul Goldstein and Eliezer Hisdai -- are leaving the council.

All media reported that on Monday, the Tel Aviv Magistrate's Court convicted Likud MK Naomi Blumenthal on charges of election bribery and other counts. The media also reported that the same court will today impose a sentence on PM Sharon's son, former MK Omri Sharon, who was convicted of falsifying corporate documents and lying under oath during his father's 1999 primaries campaign.

The major media, except Ha'aretz, led with Mofaz's approval of a reform that would cut compulsory army service for males from 36 months to 24 months. Soldiers serving in combat, combat support units, and other areas deemed vital, would serve 28 months and would receive a significant increase in monthly salaries as well as additional monetary benefits. Mofaz stressed that the implementation of the plan would be carried out gradually, in two stages, to be completed by 2010.

Leading media reported that on Monday, police questioned MKs Azmi Bishara and Talab al-Sana about recent trips to Arab countries that are considered enemy states. The electronic media reported that the Yemen-born iconic singer Shoshana Damari passed away in Tel Aviv this morning at the age of 83.

An investigate report shown on Channel 10-TV last night cast doubts on the reliability of the polling methods in various institutes in Israel. Ha'aretz commented that the findings of the report are inconclusive.

Israel Radio, Ha'aretz's web site, and the leading Internet news web site Ynet cited a Gallup poll about U.S. opinion towards Israel and the Palestinians. The media quoted Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Danny Ayalon as saying that the results of the poll showed that "the U.S. is a true friend" of Israel: -68 percent of Americans are favorable to Israel -- 21 percent "very favorable". Only 23 percent view Israel unfavorably, the lowest figure since the first Gulf War. In contrast, the favorable percentage was topped

out at 79 percent.

-A solid majority of Americans believe the U.S should not give any financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority: 57 percent of Americans oppose financial aid to the Palestinians while Hamas is in power, and 30 percent would give it only under the condition that the PA government would recognize Israel. In addition, 22 percent of Americans say the U.S. should deal with the Palestinians unconditionally. On the other hand, 44 percent say the U.S. should engage the Palestinians only in the event the new Hamas-led government recognizes Israel. One in four Americans say the United States should sever relations with the Palestinians irrespective of their official policy toward Israel. Only 11 percent of all Americans have a favorable view of the PA compared to 78 percent unfavorable, 29 percent of which hold a "very unfavorable" view. This is the most negative answer Gallup got on the PA since 2000, when it started tracking responses to this issue.

A Geocartographia poll conducted on behalf of IDF Radio found that some 70 percent of Israeli respondents believe that the implementation of the disengagement plan did not contribute anything towards peace, while only 20 percent thought the plan was a stimulus for improved relations with the Arab world. However, a significant majority believes that the withdrawal from Gaza aided relations with Europe.

Mideast:

Summary:

Op-ed Section Editor Amos Carmel wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "A normal, mature, and sane country does not need any recognition of its existence and legitimacy."

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Putin's offer to talk to Hamas is ... like a key to a lock for the Americans, a blessing and not a curse. The initiative, therefore, is in the hands of Hamas."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "John Negroponte, director of U.S. intelligence, [told] the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence ... that the Hamas victory did not necessarily mean an end to hopes of a negotiated peace agreement.... Unfortunately, Hamas does not share this viewpoint."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "The Jordan Valley settlers are part of an obsolete political worldview."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: "Sharon, in a correct strategy with the correct timing, conquered the heart of the majority of the people. Kadima will gallop ahead even without its founder."

Menachem Fruman, the Rabbi of the settlement of Tekoa, who has held meetings with Hamas leaders, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The camp of Greater Israel and the camp that wants a normal life in this country are facing off against each other.... It looks as if this country, on which so many hopes have been pinned and for whose sake we have made so very many sacrifices, will collapse."

Block Quotes:

I. "Don't Recognize Us"

Op-ed Section Editor Amos Carmel wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 14): "As experience accumulated from Israel's relations with the PLO has taught us, there is no difficulty in stretching negotiations in order to obtain a scanty [recognition], thus laying aside the need to translate it into binding steps.... Beyond the practical side, there is the simple matter of national self-pride, which too many Israelis tend to despise. A normal, mature, and sane country does not need any recognition of its existence and legitimacy.... A [modern] country can't afford any consideration of recognition or lack thereof by a religious-fanatic organization."

II. "It's Up to Hamas"

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 14): "In the context of Bush's war on terror and the trial of Hamas supporters in Florida, direct American contact with Hamas is still possible, but it is more sensitive and will be used against the administration when it is exposed in Congress and in the press. Russian President Vladimir Putin's offer to talk to Hamas is therefore like a key to a lock for the Americans, a blessing and not a curse. The initiative, therefore, is in the hands of Hamas. It is within its power to harass the miserable government of Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz and cause it a series of defeats, if only Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Mashal, instead of rejecting entirely the Israeli-American-Quartet conditions, chose to ask for time to consider, demand clarifications and offer counter-conditions. Putin and Rice will be able to call this 'transmission of messages' but it will in effect be negotiations, with agents' fees to the Russians, a result of the American-Israeli decision to allow Hamas to participate in the elections and win them."

III. "Appeasement Redux"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 14): "[In the 1930s,] the Germans weren't against 'us' [the democratic countries] but merely against the Jews, who were thus the ones pushing conflict with Germany for their own interests. Sound familiar? Just substitute Iran, Hizbullah, Hamas, radical Islamists, Iraqi insurgents or Syria. All of these groups are aligned, while the West displays its divisions and doubts.... John Negroponte, director of U.S. intelligence, [told] the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence [on February 2] that the Hamas victory did not necessarily mean an end to hopes of a negotiated peace agreement.... Unfortunately, Hamas does not share this viewpoint. It can burn all the bridges it wants and suffer little or no consequences; at least, not from the appeasers. Much of the same pattern applied to the PLO, Osama bin Laden, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, and Islamist Iran in the recent past.... After the September 11, 2001, terror attacks on America many called them a Pearl Harbor-like wake-up call to Western unity and the democratic struggle against totalitarian, anti-freedom forces. Yet there are probably more people, at least among respected Western elites, who think the problem is Islamophobia, America and Israel rather than radical Islamism, terrorism and corrupt dictatorships blaming their bad systems on others. What year is it anyway?"

IV. "Obsolete Security Asset"

Ha'aretz editorialized (February 14): "In a graduated process determined primarily by security considerations, the Israeli government has, over the last few years, almost totally severed the West Bank from the Jordan Valley, and transformed the Jordan Valley area into a Jewish region.... The Jordan Valley settlers are part of an obsolete political worldview that saw obstruction of passage from the east into Israel as an existential security need, and the settlers as those who would defend the border. This is a similar approach to the one that led to the establishment of the Gush Katif communities. Between the eastward expansion of Ma'aleh Adumim, the westward expansion of the Jordan Valley communities, and the expansion of the settlement blocs toward the Green Line, the Palestinians are left with no territory on which to establish a state. The imprisonment of the Palestinians in a small area and the increasing depletion of their sources of employment do not serve Israel's security needs, even if for a moment someone thought he succeeded in capturing another dunam [parcel of land] and more might."

1V. "A Farewell to Sharon"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (February 14): "Sharon's greatness was that at every stage he recognized the turning point.... As he lies on his deathbed, cut off from what is happening, between critical condition and danger to his life, it is infuriating to see the Schadenfreude [taking joy in the suffering of others] of the extremist rabbis and the Greater Land of Israel crazies who view his condition as punishment from heaven, and who are liable to draw encouragement from this personal tragedy which will lead to violent resistance and a civil war against those who continue his way. But their battle is lost

in advance. Sharon, in a correct strategy with the correct timing, conquered the heart of the majority of the people. Kadima will gallop ahead even without its founder."

VI. "Dialogue Is Better than a Commission of Inquiry"

Menachem Fruman, the Rabbi of the settlement of Tekoa, who has held meetings with Hamas leaders, wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 14): "The camp of Greater Israel and the camp that wants a normal life in this country are facing off against each other.... In order to prevent [clashes between them], which are, in my opinion, a far greater existential danger to our lives than the ascent of Hamas -- perhaps we would do well to try much harder to talk to each other, to respect each other, to hear each other.... And if no agreement emerges from this? I would like to respond to that with very sharp words: in that case, it seems that there will be utter destruction. It looks as if this country, on which so many hopes have been pinned and for whose sake we have made so very many sacrifices, will collapse. Such things have already happened in our nation's history. The legal institutions will not help here. A profound ideological controversy cannot be resolved by force of law. The law can and must subdue criminals, but not the world of the settlers and their supporters. Even if the media calls them 'lawbreakers' or even merely 'rioters,' they are not members of the underworld. If the feeling I have is so very harsh, one can imagine how strong the Torah's call (Deuteronomy 30:19) 'Choose life!' sounds to me. Before it is too late, let's talk."

JONES